WILLIAM G. POWELL.

If the reader who has thought it worth while to follow us through these motley pages has been at all curious in the matter he may have seen ere this that we have managed to summons here a witness almost from every walk of life to testify at the bar of public opinion in the interest of the colored race. In truth the writings which we have been trying to assemble herein are not at all the work of a leasured literati with no mission except to write, but they are the literary efforts of busy men, of whom, though

> Pressed with the load of life, the weary mind,
> Surveys the general toil of human kind.

They were men who always had a greater meassage to tell their fellow men than they had time to tell it. We must therefore find our reward for the moments spent in perusing their productions in the message they brought us rather than in the manner of its deliverance. Of those herein recorded as having brought a timely message to mankind, none wrought more lastingly than William P. Powell. William P. Powell's career is probably less definitely accentuated by known data than that of any one else herein mentioned. Not even his coming or going is absolutely known beyond a peradventure. And yet from the time of his majority till far toward the evening of his career his life was under the constant glare of publicity.

William P . Powell is one of that large number of intellectual colored men who arose in and around New York City during the first quarter of the 19th century He was according to his own words born in the State of New York some time during the year 1806, being as he himself said just 44 to the day when in December 1851 he and his family landed to begin their residence in Liverpool, England. From this same communication (A petition to the New York Legislature - A. S.S.July 17, 1851) we learn that Powell was the grandson of Elizabeth Barjova who was the cook for the first Continental Congress during the years of the peregrinating sessions and the son of " Edward Powell who was geld a slave for life by the laws of New York." Our subject's mother was probably a free woman and of Indian extraction as the grandmother's neme would suggest and as his own appearance is said, by those who knew him, to have indicated. At all events William P. Powell was born free either by reason of his free mother, or the Jay Emancipation Act of 1799, which declared all children free who should be born after the 4th of July of that year. This law also prohibited the exportation of these colored persons out of the State whether slave or free, but provided that all colored children thence born should be apprenticed ~~and~~ boys till their 28th year, and girls till their 25th year - to learn some useful occupation. But by whatever method he came to his freedom he would necessarily have to be put early to an apprenticeship in

those days. That was almost the universal custom. In the case of Powell's apprenticeship, however, we are almost as much at sea as we were about his birth-place. But everything about Powell's writing and speaking indicate a wide and accurate knowledge of the sea, such a knowledge as only long years and a close observation can give

But everything about Powell's writing and speaking indicate a wide and accurate knowledge of the sea, such a knowledge as only long years and a close observation can gain. There can be little doubt that his early years were spent at sea in some capacity probably that of cook, and that the whole period from the time of his reaching such years as would render him capable of such service till the attainment of his majority was spent on the blue waves of the deep. But strange enough we first meet with William P. Powell not in New York but in New Bedford, Mass., where according to a communication of his to the Liberator he was already well enough acquainted to be, with Richard Johnson, one of the foremost citizens forming a branch of the antislavery Society there in October 19, 1833. (See another letter from him in Liberator May 24, 1834)

Powell was even at that time a staunch Garrisonian abolitionist and a faithful subscriber and an occasional contributor to the Liberator. At New Bedford he was running a sailor-boarding house as he continued to do after going to live in New York. New Benford at that time was probably a greater shipping port than it is even today, and a large number of colored seamen went in and out there. Powell's intimate acquaintance with these seafaring men, as well as his extensive knowledge about their places of destination, and his unfailing supply of sea-yarns made his sailor's home a popular resort at all time. It was while residing in New Bedford that our subject was married to the lady who he himself tells us, was " a lineal descendant of the aborigines" around Plymouth,(See letter in Liberator. Augl,1851). Through this union he became in the course of years the father of seven children some of whom played, as we shall see, important parts in after years. While in New Bedford our author made it a point to attend most of the important conventions relative to his race and always gagave a good account of himself on such occasions. But Powell concluded that New York offered a better opportunity for a Sailors' Home, (as he called his boarding house) than New Bedford; for more sailors went in and out at the chief port of the country, and other advantages were more numerous and greater there than the New England provincial city could afford. Powell opens up his Sailor's Home at 10 John, near Gold St., New York City in 1839, and from that time until he left the country late in 1851 conducted a successful business. In New York Powell conducted his Home under the auspices of the American Seamen's Friend's Society, with an employment bureau run as an adjunct to it. He announced that " cooks, stewards and seamen who come to this house will have the choice of ships and the highest wages and if they are not satisfied after remaining twenty-four hours, no charges will be made." (Colored American, Dec. &, 1839) This would indicate that our author had somewhat of a monopoly in placing as well bearding colored seamen. Thus his " Home" was al-

ways filled with a large number of sailors and seafaring men in general and many of the antislavery people availed themselves of his hospitable board during their annual attendance at the May anniversaries.

It was during this last decade of the first half of the 19th century there in New York that his most effective work for the benefit of his race was accomplished. He was always active against thw aggressions of slavery minions. He took a prominent part in getting up public meetings either speaking or drafting the resolutions which such smeetings sent forth. Not only that; he gave freely of his means in cases where the defeat of the Fugitive slave Law was the object or the aiding of some fugitive to freedom in escape from that nefarious enactment. But active and tireless as William Powell was in these various methods of opposition to slavery his strangest claim upon posterity comes from the desultory work of his pen. He was an effective and trenchant writer, with an unfailing supply both of wit and information which always added a timely interest to whatever he had to say. His contributions on the subject of colored seamen in his day have always seemed to us invaluable as history, not to mention the unique place it fills not only in race but in general, literature, while in controversy, particularly that which occurred between him and Frederick Douglass, and has been preserved to us, Powell developed a keenness of wit and force of logic scarcely inferior to the past-masters in the art.

Toward the last " The Seamen's Home" was situated at 330 Pearl St. where the success and increase in the business made it necessary for Mr. Powell to move for larger quarters, and it was at this latter place that he amassed sufficient means to enable him to seek safety for himself and family in a foreign land, when the evil days of the Fugitive Slave Bill drew nigh. Powell like many other colored leaders was absolutely disheartened by that measure. It was not that its provisions could affect the bodily freedom of himself or the memebrs of his family; for they were all free-born with the clearest possible title to their liberty, and he himself was a voting citizen of New York. But the Fugitive Slave Bill practically made the whole country slave territory, raising over all colored men that blighting pall of despair which was second only to slavery itself. Not slaves themselves, yet like the sages and seers of old whom for no fault except birth Dante found forever doomed to the antechanber of the fourth circle of the Inferno, the free blacks, denied by law all opportunities to rise, now

" Of forgiveness lost all hope."

Powell had endured much for the sake of providing for his family, but like all ambitious parents he did not wish to entail upon his children what he had been forced to suffer. He therefore deter-

mined to quit the country. Almost upon the signing of the Fugitive Slave Bill by President Fillmore, then our author hastened to take passage for

" The inviolate Island of the sage and free,
And seek me out a home by a remoter sea"-

reaching England about the middle of December (the 12th), 1850. This first trip was made simply to look over the ground before effecting a permament settlement. The Liberator refers to him (in the August 1851) as having returned from extensive travels in England, Scotland and Ireland. One or two articles from his pen, detailing his observations there have also come down to us, and they show what is always true of Powell's writings the ability to tell all he felt and saw in that beautiful country in a most interesting farceful style. Our subject remained abroad several months visiting the various British cities, but finally concluding that Liverpool offered him such opportunities as he sought for himself and family, he returned to America and prepared to go there. It was after this homecoming that we find Powell with his wife and daughter visiting in Plymouth, Mass., looking up relatives among the Cape Indians and that he sent his well-known petition (A S S Aug. 7, & 14) to the New York Legislature stating that though he himself had been a good citizen as had his parents and grand parents he had now to leave the country to give his children such training as they needed. In the most perfect irony he told them as the State had recently been manifesting some desire to aid African colonizarion they might now furnish him and family with their passages to England. He also took a very active part in one or two fugitive slave cases, and the anticolonization meetings rendered necessary about this time by the activity of the New York Legislature in trying to promote emigration. But in reality Powell already had enough of such things, and so stated in a letter on board the packet ship Dewitt Clinton to his friend Gay of the A. S. S. on the 17th of November, 1851, when he assured the generous editor that a strong breeze from " Old blow hard" and a few rolls of the ship would soon put him and his beyond this land of " Freedom."

He did not have in mind however the rolls that greeted him and his happy family on the 21st of November some four days out from New York, when the ship was struck by a terrific storm, and for seventy hours struggled to weather the gale. Everybody even the captain himself lost all hope of reaching port. But the battered vessel finally rode out without loss of life, though the ship itself was so damaged that they had to put back for repairs, and did not get on the way again till the first of January, 1852. The Powells reached Liverpoos afterexperiencing this very rough passage, though probably not so rough as that which their whole life had been weathering in America. At Liverpool our author took up his permanent residence, entering his oldest son in a medical college and the others in the city schools, while he himself secured a place in the British Custom service in the same city. Powell was now to all intents and purposes a fullfledged Briton, and so acted and spoke whenever occasion demanded it. But he never lost interest in the cause of those he had left behind him. In his Liverpool home he remained as Cicero said of himself during Caesar's regime somewhat as if on guard with both eyes and ears ever Americawards. He continued to show himself a thorough Garrisonian by his activity in the antislavery cause in England as well as by his numerous communications to the various abolitionist organs here at home

Powell's Liverpool home became in time a kind of a half-way house for antislavery people en route from America to London and beyond. Here Parker Pillsbury and Samuel J. May and Garrison all stopped while sojourning in the world's greatest seaport, and other abolitionists scarcely less famous, and figitive slaves as well learned to regard as

Blest that abode, where want and pain repair
And every stranger finds a ready chair,)

while residing in Powell's vicinity in Liverpool. Of the latter class he tells us that he not infrequently provided with food, and raiment some half dozen in as many months. (Standard Aug. 6,1853) And thus his home continued to his fellow countrymen as long as he remained in England. But those were stirring times by reason of the rapid changes then going on in America, and the greatest changes was the war itself which the keen eye of Powell saw lowering over his native land, and which caused him - now that his children had their training - to turn his steps homeward. We find him about New Bedford in 1861 where he was delivering a first of August oration in his old homestead and taking a leading part in one or two antislavery meetings, and where his son William the physician opened up an office and began the practice of medicine. The young man continued his residence in New Bedford till the Exigencies of the war rendered his services as surgeon necessary in the field when he responded to the summons of his country and in the service he remained till the war was over. Others of the boys entered the army as privates/ and one at least of those who had studied the profession of civil engineering while abroad was for sometime employed in the engineering department for the construction of streets in New York City. But the father returned to his old place at the " Seamen Home" or rather established a new business under the old name at # 2 Dover St., where he was doing business when the Draft Riot mob attacked and destroyed his place in 1863. Powell and his family only escaped death by his letting his wife and children down from a back window and he himself leaping out of the same. When that misfortune befell our subject his home contained some four hundred seamen boarders and the place was being run on a strictly temperance basis. Powell and his family (his wife and daughters) went for a while to New Bedford where they remained until the excitement was somewhat passed. His loss in property and business amounted to several thousand dollars. He opened up his house again for a while but started another place at 153 Thompson St. in the course of time which was known as the Poll House, and here continued to carry on the hotel business in his own well-known way up to the time of his departure for the West (about 1875). He was also a Notary Public, and did some legal business in connection with it. In the meanwhile our author kept up his usual interest in the advancement of his race's political as well as social status, and was always found at gatherings and conventions held for such purposes.

Powell did not live long after settling in California wither he went some time in 1875. He was in fact on the way to Honolulu when overtaken by death.